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One Giant Leap For Mankind

by Philip Silvia

B AISLE 12 ROW 13 SEAT	PORTAL 13	1973 1:00 P. M. GAME 8	 <i>The New York Football Giants</i> vs Minnesota Vikings YALE BOWL NEW-HAVEN, CONN. Sunday, Dec. 16, 1973-1:00 p.m. EST. PRICE \$7.27 STATE TAX .73 \$8.00 (NO REFUNDS)
		RES. SEAT \$8.00	

Thanks, guys, for winning Super Bowl XXI. While candor doesn't allow for overlooking a generation's passage between triumphs, victory has muted the pain. Life has at last been righted for New York Football Giants' loyalists, myself included. I now cherish my unused ticket to the '73 seasonal closing contest (when the weather was as impossibly bitter as the team's play) as a souvenir of sport-bonding friendship rather than as a disturbing reminder of life during what seemed an interminable downward cycle.

That is the way it should be, for my Fall River gang had staying power even in the worst of times. For instance, during the early 1970s we gathered -as always- on Sundays. The only difference was that we met much earlier than usual, piling into the Volkswagen bus that was directed to our meccas, Yankee Stadium and, later, the Yale Bowl. This odyssey ended in '74 when the arrival of my firstborn, Katie, led to a radical change in lifestyle. It was patently unfair to further tax my indulgent and patient wife, Gerry. I forfeited cherished season tickets. I'd still watch the games, but from afar.

It was of course the right thing to do. Still, I sometimes can't help but wonder... What is it like to observe home games at the beautiful Meadowlands facility? If I had had just a tad more persistence (13 seasons), what stadium vantage point would I have earned? Might I have sat beside a former President whose Washington-days penchant for designing diagrams for George Allen on how best to break into enemy territory was once dismissed as harmless diversion from duty? Or perhaps this voluntary self-denial dashed an opportunity to socialize with quintessential Giants' fan Andy Rooney at which time I could have invited him to climb the career ladder as a *Bridgewater Review* guest columnist.

With this latter opportunity missed, it behooves me as Rooney's surrogate and fellow celebrant to portray the

sense of freedom and renewed optimism unleashed by the victory at Pasadena. This smoothing of life's rocky road is best understood within a proper historical context.

You don't have to be Marshall McLuhan to understand the enormous impact once achieved by the transmission of Giants' contests via a small, round-screened picture. My teenaged friends and I were addicted to this winning team by the mid-'50s. The Giants became our viewer joy, the perfect cold weather antidote to Tom Yawkey's heartbreakers, who forever offered us Buddin' springtime hope that wilted with the August heat and left us un-Consolo-able. Thus, for a few seasons *Growing Up Catholic* was a memorable ritual that began at the Saturday confessional and concluded with announcer Chris Schenkel's sign off (if one ignores the long-term gastronomical repercussions of game-time "feasting" on Dirty Nick's Coney Islanders, - hot weiners with the works fresh from the seediest joint in Fall River).

This exposure resulted in sensible enslavement, even though the mid-'60s marked the beginning of 20 years of unrelenting spectator misery. This was merely a minor setback! The winning of Superbowl XXI only reinforces my mature perspective: until quite recently, no other professional football franchise warranted comparable emotional attachment from New Englanders in the over-40 age bracket. Of course, some teams, including the Patriots, have vied for that loyalty and have even captured the faint of heart.

Loyalty to the dynasty darlings of the mid-80s, those Big Bad Bears, is just one example of this failed judgement. This phenomena is happily ephemeral, for these "Monsters of the Midway" are going the way of all flesh, suffering a meltdown, Refrigerator or not. All is not Sweetness with this cast of characters, although Coach Mike Ditka deserves attention. More complex than his Jack Webb-Lou Gossage

D.I. image, Ditka possesses sufficient macho security to reveal a soft side, pledging, for instance, to refrain from future sideline scolding of cute, diminutive quarterback Doug Flutie, acknowledging its equivalency to chastizing Bambi. Fiercely independent, he contradicts the NFL's great-man-theme.

And what of the Patriots? Patsies no more, having earned fan support by impressive play during the '85 season. This happened under the tutelage of a coach outdone in animation by mummies over at the Museum of Fine Arts, a coach who has developed the novel approach of communicating through the sound of silence (or by ventriloquism, which then makes dummies of his quarterbacks).

Anything is possible under his leadership, for Raymond Berry was the original Magic Man, a classic overachiever who, as a Baltimore Colts' star, always transcended physical limitations. He is in fact the original source of all my former sorrow. There is a tendency to remember only Alan Ameche's easy romp into the end zone in sudden death overtime which gave Baltimore the famous title game of '58. But Giants' fans understand that the outcome was really decided by Unitas to Berry, time and again: perfectly executed patterns, those down and outs.

Down and out indeed. After this contest, my beloved Giants remained agonizingly competitive, participating in four of the next five championships, but always coming up short. An undercurrent of pessimism began taking hold. Then came the slide - "Good-bye Allie," Rocky Thompson, the New Haven experience, and Joe Pisarcik. The deadening consistency of their ineptitude seeped into my very being.

The end result, while it may have helped steel me against life's greater (?) adversities, also muted any indulgent tendency to embrace complete personal happiness, until now, when victory has blessedly exorcised these painful memories.

Finally, there is a message in all this for adults with teen rearing responsibilities. Do not be deceived by those who glibly praise your team for making it to The Big One. It is not enough. Remember - my purged nightmare was rooted far back in '58. Therefore, do deal tenderly with impressionable youngsters whose psyches were devastated last October when their joy was cast away by Steamer's best Mark Clear imitation and Billy Buck's bungle. There is only one solution, for Vince Lombardi was partially right. Winning (it all) is the only thing, at least once.

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